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ABSTRACT

Teams are an important element of restructuring organizations because much of the work of the organization is being done in small units, the microcosms of organizations. Total Quality Management (TQM) is one way to analyze the importance of teamwork during restructuring. This paper describes the basic principles and tools of TQM and considers its use in the business and higher educational sector. Some essential issues regarding teams and teamwork in TQM are reviewed, and some conclusions are drawn based on research into TQM and well-functioning teams. A basic TQM tenet is that managers and supervisors must cease to be managers and become leaders who create an environment in which people can develop and apply their collective potential while working around their individual weaknesses. The success of the total quality and continuous improvement initiatives is based on the success of team members with regard to fulfilling their individual and group missions. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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The Vital Role of Task Teams: The Total Quality Management Approach on Restructuring Organizations

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Introduction

Teams are an important issue in the discussion of restructuring organizations, because much of the work of organizations is done in small units. Small groups are the microcosms of organizations. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a possible avenue to analyze the importance of teamwork in times of restructuring organizations. This work will briefly describe the basic principles and tools of TQM. Then, it will be introduced TQM's issues from the business and educational sector. Next, it will analyze some essential issues regarding TQM's teams and teamwork, as key concepts in the restructuring strategy. Finally, the study will finish with a general conclusion about our research on TQM and well-functioning teams.

TQM's Principles and Tools

First of all, it is important to introduce a general definition of TQM. Chaffee and Sherr (1992) define Total Quality Management (TQM) as a comprehensive way of life for an organization, which becomes driven by a commitment to continuously improve service to others. This commitment is so central that quality-driven businesses organizations claim to place the pursuit of quality ahead of short-term profit. The drive toward perfection is the essence of "quality" in TQM. As a consequence, quality is not a state of being (noun) but something people do (a verb). Another authors, Heverly and Cornesky (1992) understand Total Quality Management (TQM) as a philosophy of improving quality by

ceaselessly improving the processes that support the mission of an organization. In contrast to the traditional management assumption that quality improvements are associated with increased costs, TQM teaches that continuous process improvement enhances productivity and lowers costs.

TQM's basic principles are long-term thinking, process orientation, and a customer focus. TQM requires a long-term view because its implementation takes time and effort. Also, TQM emphasizes an institution's processes, not its products or outcomes. Processes are identified and studied, and data are gathered to understand how the processes are operating. The goal is to continuously improve processes, because a better process yields better outcomes. This approach is preventive in nature.

TQM's principles combined with TQM's tools mean opportunities for improvement in functions, services, concepts, processes, products, and morale. Furthermore, TQM provides a conceptual framework for approaching problems that can improve decision making through the use of easily understood methods and tools. One of the challenges that teams and operational units often face is clearly defining the way things happen and determining the best way of implementing and measuring process improvement. TQM launched a detailed discussion of statistical tools that can be used to measure, analyze, and improve a system or a process.

Although some of the TQM's tools are specific to industry, many of the techniques are applicable to the improve processes in the service sector. For example, Koberna and Walter (1993) argue

that TQM offers a wide variety of tools for process improvement in a Community College. These authors found out that in Rio Salado Community College they apply these tools for four main purposes: meeting facilitation, process definition, project selection, and data gathering and analysis. Not only are these tools used by formal continuous improvement teams (CITs), but they are also being applied increasingly in meetings, planning, decision making, and problem solving by operational units throughout the college.

Seymour (1993) offers a succinct description of seven basics tools that are applicable to higher education and are very straightforward in their application.

1. Flow charts or process-flow diagrams are the visual representation of the various steps involved in a process. A process cannot be improved unless everyone understands and agrees on what the process is. To that end, a flow chart describes what is going on.

2. Cause-and-effect or fishbone diagrams are used to depict (causes) of a specific problem (effect) and to group them according to categories. Brainstorming sessions, observation, interviewing, or survey research are often used to enumerate the causes.

3. Pareto charts are used to separate the most important characteristics of an event from the least important characteristics of an event. It is a way to sort out the "vital few" from the "trivial many."

4. Histograms are used to measure the frequency of an event and then displayed as a frequency distribution. Histograms provide

valuable information concerning the variability of a process.

5. Run charts show the results of a process plotted over a period of time. They are useful to see the dynamic aspects of a process and to identify cyclical patterns.

6. Scatter diagrams show the relationship or association (but not the cause and effect) between any two variables.

7. Control charts are run charts with statistically determined upper and lower limits. They are used to study the amount of variation in a process and to make judgments about the source of that variation.

Why TQM in business and education?

The reasons for adopting a total quality approach have in common the desire to improve the performance of the organization. Beyond that overarching goal, the specific motivations relate to the unique circumstances specific to each organization. The commonality within the manufacturing and service sectors is that TQM is viewed as a strategy that can help organizations simultaneously to increase quality and decrease costs. The indicators for total quality in business and education are efficiency, cost improvement, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction. In essence, these are the same indicators that are relevant for service and manufacturing industries (Tuttle, 1994).

Industry, as well as a growing number of government and public sector organizations, is attempting to adopt new management philosophies based on the tenets of TQM, such as teamwork, trust,

communication, empowerment, and reward. TQM offers a new management paradigm that can overcome the dysfunctions of the human resource system and other rules-based management systems (Scully, 1996). Organizations must foster a team environment with dynamism and flexible boundaries, in which employees can overcome the liabilities inherent in hierarchical and individual-focused management systems.

In the last years, higher education institutions have realized the necessity of improving their service. Lembcke (1994) states that a growing number of institutions in higher education are investing in the transformation of traditional management practices adapted from Taylorism after the turn of the century into a new style of leadership known as total quality management (TQM). TQM encourages broad staff participation in problem solving, use of new tools and techniques for process improvement, and relentless focus on meeting or exceeding customer needs. The purpose of transforming current management practices into TQM is to increase organizational performance. From his research, Lembcke argues that the critical step in the transformation of hierarchical, bureaucratic administrative organizations into high-performing, customer-pleasing, streamlined service providers has three parts. First, clarify customers and understand their needs, expectations, and requirements; second, clarify organizational purpose; and, third, view administrative tasks called "work" within the context of a network of interconnected, interdependent work processes designed to meet or exceed customer needs.

The team is a key concept in the TQM's strategy.

The concept of teams and teamwork has become important in the last two decades. The focus of human resource management has historically been on the recruitment, placement, compensation, development, and evaluation of individuals rather than groups. It has recently become apparent that this contributes to rivalries, competition, favoritism, and self-centeredness, which collectively counter the focus on the two most important functions of any organization: accomplishing the mission and service to customers (Lewis and Smith, 1994).

The central role of the team, and the need for such team skills as cooperation, interpersonal communication, cross-training, and group decision making, is a fundamental shift in how work within colleges and universities is viewed. Presently, cooperation among administrative divisions and academic departments is not encouraged. The predominant practice is individual advancement. This is encouraged by administration with such practices as management by objectives and individual performance evaluation and promotion. On the academic side, faculty members are expected to work alone and even compete for limited resources, such as grant money.

At the end, the success of every organization fully rests on the effectiveness of each team. These authors describe the key differences between groups and teams. Groups can be productive, but it is becoming increasingly evident that just bringing a group of individuals together to complete specific tasks is ineffective

and unproductive. The term "team" has come to be accepted to describe a group of people who are goal centered, interdependent, honest, open, supportive, and empowered. Members of a team develop strong feelings of allegiance that go beyond the mere grouping of individuals. The productive outcome is synergistic, and the accomplishment often exceeds the original goals of the task (Lewis and Smith).

Every team has essential characteristics, regardless of the type of business or industry and the type of product or service offered. Milas (1996) states that the first requirement is that the team has a designated leader. The leadership role must be an established, formal position, and with defined responsibilities. Second, there must be a facilitator. A team facilitator is the objective and responsible third party who is concerned with the process of teamwork and problem solving. A facilitator has to establish an atmosphere in which the team process will be successful. Finally, there are the team members themselves. Team members must be given an opportunity to create, innovate, learn, inspire, and advance their careers as a consequence of their team experience.

Lewis and Smith (1994) describe four types of teams necessary to effectively implement total quality improvement. The first is the "lead team," also identified as the "Quality Council." This team is responsible for the strategic management of the quality process. It functions as the steering committee in that it sets policy, establishes guidelines, and handles overall logistics and

communication for the teams operating under it. The other three teams operate under the lead team and are located throughout the college or university. The "functional team" is the work group from a single work or functional area. The ideal size of a functional team is six to eight persons. The "cross-functional teams" includes people from more than one work area. This team is responsible for projects that cut across functional lines. The "task team" includes people from one or more functional areas. It is formed to solve a specific problem or group of problems and is then disbanded. Management typically assigns membership and tasks, that is, by the lead team.

At this point, it is important to mention the importance of TQM's ideas to manage projects. Lewis and Smith (1994) describe seven steps to describe the management of projects from a total quality perspective. The first step, "define the problem," asks for a factual statement of the problem and provides space for a flow chart of the problem and other data display (e.g., control chart). The second step, "observe the problem," examines the problem from various viewpoints, and relying less on narrative and more on such tools such as bar graphs and control and/or Pareto charts. Step three, "determine the causes of the problem," consists of first identifying possible reasons for the problem and then analyzing these reasons. A cause-and-effect, or fishbone, diagram is an effective tool for identifying reasons, and a Pareto chart is useful in the analysis.

Based on these three analytical steps, appropriate "action to

eliminate the main causes" (step four) can be taken. Data sources should be listed in order to evaluate root causes and proposed solutions. The focus is on action (i.e., Plan, Do, Check, Act). Try a solution and carry it out. Then, step five, "study the results," can be initiated. Data must be evaluated, and the situation before and after the action was implemented should be compared. If the result is not what was desired, another solution should be considered.

Step six is "standardize the changes" after the desired results are achieved. Communicate the changes to everyone. Appropriate training must be provided and a feedback system developed to determine compliance with the new standard. In step seven (the last step), "state the final conclusions" for future reference. It describes what was learned, both the benefits and the mistakes.

High-involvement work teams are now more characteristics of successful, high-performance enterprises than they have ever been. Wright and Brauchle (1994) st[illegible] that the workteams are a very powerful tool for unleashing the creativity and problem solving ability of everyone within an organization. A company provides its high-involvement teams with time to meet regularly and discuss productivity and quality problems that affect them and their jobs. Then, the teams take direct action to solve those problems. Management lends support as needed, and the organization supplies any necessary resources. High-involvement work teams can lead to higher productivity, better quality, and a closer focus by workers

on what the organization really is supposed to be doing. But high-performance work teams are not particularly easy to develop or sustain. A useful strategy to increase active participation from many levels in improving the business of an organization has three components: preparation, initiation, and maintenance.

To prepare an organization for embarking on a move to high-performance work teams, it is required to accomplish four objectives: get management support, establish a steering committee, understand the corporate culture, and set realistic expectations. The second component of a move to high involvement is the initiation stage. Proper initiation of team building in the organization is a subtle process. It is helpful to know how and when to get the right team members involved. It has been found a four-step sequence: work with the steering committee, select the first group, work on gaining credibility, and create a training plan.

People in an organization are naturally interested in the team-building process when it is started --simply because it is something new and different. Sustaining the effort of high-involvement processes is the third critical component of becoming a participatory organization. Managers and team builders can facilitate this step by keeping in mind the following five areas of concern: keeping the interest of groups, helping groups work together, working with cross-functional teams, keeping management invested in the process, and knowing when and how to leave.

Conclusion

A basic TQM tenet is that managers and supervisors must cease to be managers and become leaders. Leaders must create an environment in which people can develop and apply their collective potential and work around their individual weaknesses. TQM creates a new kind of organization in which leadership is prized and work is accomplished by teams of empowered employees.

A well-functioning team has clearly defined goals and the resources to accomplish them, and ownership of the work is conveyed to the team. A well-functioning team communicates. The cohesiveness of a team, the level playing field, the affection and mutual respect that often develop, the ongoing proximity of its members, and the common goals that motivate a team all operate as powerful antidotes to the communication barriers found within normal hierarchies. Of all the factors essential to the success of a total quality initiative, the instillment of cooperation and motivation in the workforce ranks among the most important. All levels of employees must "buy into" the TQM process at the inception, and continuously throughout the evolution of the improvement process.

The visionary executive and the total quality steering committee must provide new teams with opportunity, resources, knowledge, and guidance sufficient to create a self-sustaining and self-nurturing entity that will survive and prosper. In the team building process, it is important to allow adequate time for teams and individuals to absorb their new roles, and to help them avoid

potential pitfalls. Finally, it must be clearly understood by the organization that the success of the total quality and continuous improvement initiatives is based on the success of team members with regard to fulfilling their individual and group missions.

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